Current status of SOGIE - related school violence in Vietnam: Some findings from a national study

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ABSTRACT: *SOGIE-related school violence covers sexuality and gender-identity/expression-related bullying and other violent acts and threats, occurring in and around educational contexts. These may result in physical, verbal, sexual, psychosocial or technology-related harm to children. It is based on gender and sexuality stereotypes, particularly roles and norms expected of children because of the privileging of heterosexual norms and gender roles in society. The study on SOGIE-related school violence in secondary schools of Viet Nam revealed some important findings on the level of SOGIE-related violence that LGBT students experienced in schools, their perception of school safety, as well as their responses to this form of school violence. Based on the evidence collected from the study results, several recommendations were proposed, including those for policy makers, curriculum developers, and schools, to prevent SOGIE-related school violence and build a safe, healthy school environment for all learners.*

1. Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several global legislations state that all people should be protected against discrimination and violence in education, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (UN, 1948; UN General Assembly, 1966). Homophobic and transphobic violence in schools has been framed by officials as the basis of an international public health crises. UNESCO has particularly targeted homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools in recent years, supporting global and Asia-Pacific research, advocacy and programming. Viet Nam has committed to international and regional efforts to lessen gender-based violence. This includes sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE)-related violence in schools.

SOGIE diversity is recognized world-wide and has been strongly established in the histories of many nations. SOGIE-related school violence, also called homophobic and transphobic violence (and sometimes used interchangeably with homophobic and transphobic bullying), is based on gender stereotypes, roles and norms. It can include verbal, psychosocial, physical and sexual violence, all lead to unsafe and unhealthy school environment, especially for LGBT students. A study in 2015-2016 on SOGIE-related school violence, conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training of Viet Nam (MOET) and UNESCO, has addressed this issue in different aspects and proposed some recommendations for policy makers, curriculum developers and schools (UNESCO, 2016a).

2. Definition and forms of SOGIE-related school violence

Definition

The term *'sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE)'* is preferred by the UN and UNESCO in global discussions of homophobic and transphobic bullying (UN, 2012; UNESCO, 2012). It is useful as a broad umbrella-term which allows for many different notions of sexual and gender difference seen in various countries around the world.

Diversity in *sexual orientation* (emotional and sexual attraction to other people, who may be of the opposite gender, same gender, or another gender identity) has been established in the histories of many nations. Sexual orientation variance which covers same-sex attraction can include, but is not limited to, such 'labels' as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, fluid, queer and many other terms. These terms are usually addressed altogether as LGBT (Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender) or LGBTI (with I as Intersex).

Diversity in *gender identity* (how a person identifies as being a man, woman, neither, or both, or a combination, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth) and *expression* (how a person expresses

their gender through manners, dress, social roles and other means) has been documented for years in many societies with varying levels of acceptance.

Accordingly, SOGIE-related school violence is understood in this report as covering sexuality and gender-identity/ expression-related bullying – both acts and threats – occurring in and around educational contexts. These may result in physical, verbal, sexual, psychosocial or technology-related harm to children. It is based on gender and sexuality stereotypes, particularly roles and norms expected of children because of the privileging of heterosexual norms and gender roles in society. Any learner, irrespective of their sexual orientation or whether they are gender-non-conforming, may be affected (UNESCO & UNDP, 2015). SOGIE-related school violence can take place in school, or on the way to and from school. It can impact both younger and older children in different levels of schooling (Allan et al, 2008). It can be perpetrated by peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. In the technology-based society like ours today, communication means such as social networks (facebook, twitter, instagrams…) and mobile phone have also become platforms for cyber-bullying and violence.

Forms of SOGIE-related violence

The forms of SOGIE-related school violence identified in the conceptual literature are complex and diverse and include verbal, psychosocial, physical and sexual violence (UNESCO, 2015). Verbal violence is characterized by verbal taunting, teasing, gossiping, curses, harsh words and the spreading of rumors. Social exclusion, threats and humiliation exemplify psychosocial violence. Physical violence may occur when a learner is beaten, kicked, pinched, hit with something and, in some extreme cases, burnt with acid. Physical violence can also be in the form of corporal punishment, which is recognized as any punishment where physical force is intentionally used to cause pain or discomfort (for instance, "smacking", slapping, or "spanking" children with the hand, pulling hair or forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions,…) Sexual violence is often recognized as threats and acts of unwanted sexual touching, comments and pictures, sexual favors and rape.

Different forms of SOGIE-related school violence may interact and overlap each other. Bullying, for instance, occurs when there is an imbalance of power between the "bully" and the "bullied" and can happen through physical contact, verbal attacks, social exclusion, and psychological manipulation. Students are bullied when they are repeatedly and intentionally exposed to harmful and/or aggressive behaviour that results in injury or discomfort.

3. The study on SOGIE-related school violence in Viet Nam

3.1. Context of the study

In line with the international requirements to 'protect all individuals from violent behaviors originating from discrimination against LGBT people' in UN Resolution No. 17/19 on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression (UN, 2012), the Government of Viet Nam, including the MOET, has commissioned the study reported upon in this article, with the technical and financial support of UNESCO and its partners. The study aimed to build Viet Nam's evidence base regarding the nature, extent and impact of homophobic and transphobic bullying and violence around sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE). The overall goal of this work was to generate research which could inform future programmatic initiatives so that Viet Nam can put into practice its commitments to creating safe schooling environments. This work was conducted as a smaller study that sat within a wider project exploring school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in Viet Nam (UNESCO, 2016b).

3.2. Research objectives and design

Objectives of the research are:

To gather information on the awareness and attitudes regarding SOGIE-related school violence

for students, teachers, school administrators and parents;

To gather evidence on the nature and scale of violence against LGBT students;

To identify the main drivers or contributing factors toward SOGIE-related school violence;

To explore the impacts of violence for LGBT students;

To understand violence response measures in schools, and further effective actions that could contribute towards preventing SOGIE-related school violence.

Research design

The study was conducted in 6 provinces representing three regions of the country: North, Central and South. Provinces were randomly chosen, with two provinces selected to represent each region. Four participating schools were selected in each province including two lower-secondary schools and two upper secondary ones, including at least one urban school and one rural school for each learning level. The names of the provinces and the schools are not disclosed in this report to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. The study was conducted from August 2014 to May 2015.

Research design included the components of paper-based questionnaire, focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews (IDIs), and and online survey.

The sample for the quantitative data (using the

questionnaire tool) included students, teachers/ administrators, and parents in six provinces representing North, Central and South of Viet Nam. Students and parents were randomly

selected with the coordination support of the Student Affairs Department underMOET. The selected list was sent to each school together with the Consent Forms to offer these individuals the chance to participate in the research. All students in the list were given opportunities to read about the research and freely signed the Consent Forms before the research team came to the school for data collection. For teachers and administrators, invitation to participate was offered where there was minimum disruption to the teaching work planned. In total of 3,698 people participated in the survey (both offline and online). Qualitative data were collected in 12 lower and one upper secondary schools. There are 85 IDIs and 48 FGDs (4-6 people/group or 280 persons) were conducted in total. The interviewed and discussed participants include students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and LGBT students.

The recruitment of LGBT students outside of the school sample was undertaken through LGBT networks, communities, and organizations active across the country (such as ICS and iSEE). Research was conducted on the nature and extent of SOGIE-related school violence in schools in North, Central and South of Viet Nam as part of a wider study on school-related gender-based violence. Issues of consent and privacy for participants were carefully considered. Stakeholders were enabled to freely discuss the sensitive topic of SOGIE-related school violence due to the support of Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). The research was aided by a range of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (abbreviated to LGBT in this report as in the broader literature) community organizations, departmental and school contacts, and local and international research experts.

4. Some key findings from the study
4.1. Students' awareness of SOGIE-related violence in schools

LGBT students showed more comprehensive awareness of SOGIE-related school violence than other groups, particularly verbal violence and its negative long-term effects. LGBT students repeatedly commented that verbal and psychological violence was the most frightening type of violence, while other students were more likely to frame violence as physical violence and teachers and parents were more likely to consider technology-related violence. The LGBT students explained that their fear of verbal/psychological violence was due to the threat it constituted to their mental health and wellbeing. Various LGBT students made similar comments including those who were lesbian – "I am most scared of psychological bullying because it would bring me down mentally"

(IDI, a lesbian student, North); gay – "For me the most threatening form of violence is mental violence because I am easily affected and sensitive. If I lose my control, I don't know what I would do" (IDI, a gay male student, North); and transgender – "I am more scared of psychological violence. It will be over in the case of physical violence, but psychological violence would gradually be absorbed into the brain and follow me in all activities I do" (IDI, a transgender male-to-female student, North). Part of the psychological threat of verbal violence for LGBT students was the use of discriminatory and scientifically inaccurate beliefs about their identities; a gay male student commented "The thing that hurts and offends me the most is when other people say LGBT is a disgusting disease" (IDI, a gay male student, Central). Verbal violence was also framed by LGBT students' comments as their most commonly experienced type of violence; including verbal discrimination, being gossiped about and/or the subject of foul rumors. This often led to being avoided and suffering from social isolation; one lesbian noted "When I told my dear friend that I am interested in girls, she started… keeping distance from me, heaping insults and negative actions against me" (IDI, a lesbian student, North); another said there were "a lot of negative gossips and rumors (about people like us) People have even insulted us as morbid and peculiar creatures" (IDI, a lesbian student, North).

In rarer examples, some LGBT youth did not actually understand that the discrimination they experienced was a form of violence; "I have never experienced gender-based violent events, but only discriminatory incidents" (IDI, a gay male student, Central). However, most LGBT students overall understood that SOGIE- related verbal violence and discrimination was violence. Non-LGBT students were more likely to discuss SOGIE-related school violence (including physical, verbal and psychosocial violence) than parents and teachers, recalling how they had seen kids subjected to homophobia and cruel gender comments. "In my school, there is a boy who is often teased that way", said one student, "a male student, a bit sissy, weak and small, is frequently shoved and pushed down by other peers" (IDI, a lower secondary male student, South). A male upper-secondary student recalled a Grade 11 boy whom he said "looks like a girl, walks like a girl, and only plays with girls". He discussed how this boy was teased by male students particularly, "being called *pê-đê*" (a Vietnamese insulting term used to refer to gay men), or "*ái nam ái nữ*" (a Vietnamese insulting term used to refer to bisexual, homosexual, and transgender people)" (IDI, an upper secondary male student, Central). Contrasting with the student groups, parents and teachers did not comment on SOGIE-related school violence without prompting.

4.2. Experience of LGBT students to violence in schools

LGBT students face higher risks of and suffer more from SOGIE-related violence

LGBT students were more exposed to violence in all forms than non-LGBT students according to data from statistical analysis of responses from 2,636 students on the forms of violence they had personally experienced**.** This was true for physical violence, verbal violence, social violence, sexual violence, and Internet/mobile devices-related violence. Specifically, the data in Table 1 shows that 71% of LGBT students had experienced physical violence, 72.2% verbal violence, 65.2% social violence,

26% sexual violence and 20% technology-related violence. A gay male student gave a shocking example, 'I was locked up in a room and beaten after having revealed my homosexual identity, as peers considered that people like me make school impure' (IDI, gay male student, Central). Another student commented on prolific verbal violence and sexual violence experienced by herself and other LGBT peers at her school:

"In my school, wherever I went, there was always a group of schoolmates who made negative comments about others and touched their body parts, even though we did not know each other" (Student FGD, North).

Table 1: **LGBT students' experiences of violence compared to non-LGBT students**

	Male		Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Physical violence	578	64.7%	495	51.1%	530	71.0%	.000***
Was slapped, shoved, hit, kicked, pinched, or had hair pulled.	427	47.4%	342	35.3%	362	48.1%	.000***
Was threatened with a weapon [e.g. scissors, knife, or gun].	76	8.4%	31	3.2%	80	10.6%	.000***
Was locked into a classroom, toilet, or some other room.	430	47.8%	345	35.4%	430	57.1%	.000***
Had belongings stolen, hidden or destroyed [e.g. shoes, books, mobile phones, money]	113	12.5%	72	7.4%	135	17.9%	.000***
Verbal violence	491	54.5%	507	51.9%	540	72.2%	.000***
Had money robbed or was extorted.	359	39.8%	337	34.7%	358	47.5%	.000***
Was insulted, heard insults against one's parents, imitated, subjected to sarcasm.	71	7.9%	42	4.3%	90	11.9%	.000***
Was verbally threatened.	316	35.0%	224	23.0%	276	36.7%	.000***
Subjected to comments/stories aimed to humiliate, offend or ridicule.	280	31.0%	227	23.3%	321	42.7%	.000***
Social violence	492	54.7%	439	45.4%	488	65.2%	.000***
Was subjected to gossip, rumours, or bad talk behind one's back.	305	33.8%	335	34.3%	388	51.8%	.000***
Was boycotted against, isolated, banned, excluded from group or activity by students.	137	15.2%	169	17.3%	213	28.2%	.000***
Was given insulting, mean, disrespectful or unpleasant looks.	367	40.6%	403	41.3%	427	56.6%	.000***
Sexual violence	199	22.0%	103	10.6%	195	26.0%	.000***
Had one's skirt pulled up, one's pants taken down or one's shirt taken off.	133	14.7%	74	7.6%	134	17.8%	.000***
Was subjected to non-consensual touching of private parts.	113	12.5%	44	4.5%	126	16.7%	.000***
Forced to have sex.	8	.9%	4	.4%	35	4.6%	.000***
Technology-related violence	119	13.2%	70	7.2%	151	20.0%	.000***
Was threatened, abused, or had a secret exposed or a story fabricated about oneself on the Internet or through a mobile phone.	48	5.3%	30	3.1%	67	8.9%	.000***
Had harmful photos or video clips spread about oneself on Internet or through mobile phone.	50	5.5%	21	2.2%	54	7.2%	.000***
Had messages or emails requesting unwanted sexual relations.	10	1.1%	14	1.4%	39	5.2%	.000***
Had 'identity' stolen, and fake personal information spread via the Internet.	58	6.4%	19	1.9%	74	9.8%	.000***

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001

School teachers and staff can be the source of myths and misunderstanding about SOGIE

Through FGDs and IDIs, *some LGBT students revealed that they had experienced situations in which schools teachers and staff contributed to violence through their misunderstanding of SOGIE-related themes.* Sometimes this violence was in the form of direct verbal homophobic discrimination and shaming. For example, a gay student commented, "the teacher said I am a "pervert" in front of the class" (FGD, gay male students, South). A lesbian student said that in Grade 10 "a teacher in the school even convened my parents and asked them to reconfirm my gender identity" (FGD, lesbians, South). Another student explained:

*"A small number of teachers have sympathy; others do not want us to be in their class (...) they often use unpleasant words and phrases. For example, the English language teacher uses words such as gay or pederast which are not written in textbooks but he still taught students, suggesting that you should all keep away from these people or you would be like them one day. When teaching a lesson on sexuality, the teacher of Biology subject said (gay) people lack male hormone or female hormone, then they need to go to Ho Chi Minh City for testosterone injections." (*FGD, LGBT students, South)

Another gay male student explained that the teacher of Citizenship Education at his school viewed homosexuality as a disease and advised gay students not to disclose their sexuality or crushes to anyone. When teaching about love, "she said there is only love between male and female and any other kind of love is neither recognized nor accepted" (IDI, a gay male student, South).

Transphobia could be expressed by teachers in more insidious, indirect ways, which appeared to be about re-asserting male or female norms, or disparaging the loss of some kind of traditional gender ideal. For example, a gender non-conforming student stated "in one biology class, when seeing me go to the board for solving a problem, my teacher said: this society is full of chaos now" (FGD, gender-non-conforming students, South). A gender-non-conforming student recalled "there was a time when we had an exam, one (exam supervisor) asked another (exam supervisor) whether I was a boy or a girl, then made me sit at the front desk and stared at me" (FGD, gender-non-conforming students, South). A male-to-female transgender student explained that parents were often called in to help correct transgender youth:

"In my class, teachers are very old-fashioned. I know for sure that I am a girl by appearance but inside me is a boy. When I did not follow their instructions, they called my parents to school to talk (...) Teachers view that issue (homosexuality, transgenderism) as something really disgusting."

One gender non-conforming female student recalled how recently when she was in Grade 10, her male mathematics teacher had pulled her up in front of the whole class to shame her for her masculine appearance and caused her deep humiliation. "I felt that I was not respected. (The teacher) said that I was not a boy and wrote some nonsense on the board to illustrate. I was then extremely offended" (IDI, agender non-conforming female student, North). Another girl with a masculine appearance was confronted by a cleaner when she was entering the women's toilets.

*"(The cleaner) slammed the toilet door and asked 'what are you doing here?' I told her that I needed to go to the toilet and she said 'you are a male student, why are you coming here?' 'I am a girl' I said. 'You are not normal, don't come here anymore' she said to me. That was the first time I cried because of this." (*Student IDI, North).

The LGBT students interviewed often argued that violence from school staff occurred because most staff saw them as abnormal, or even as suffering from some kind of disease. One girl reflected, "Teachers said that these students (i.e. LGBT like us) look as if they were autistic and did not get along well with other people" (IDI, bisexual female student, North). A gay male student commented that "The Grade 9 female teacher said I had contracted a disease and asked my dad to send me to hospital for a medical diagnosis" (FGD, gay male student, Central). Another gay male recalled:

*"(Despite my) outstanding academic results at school, my homeroom teacher contacted other subject teachers, suggesting that they should pay more attention to me to help me out because I was "off track" (...) Another teacher told me that being homosexual is really miserable and suggested that one would have to change my gender (...) She said that she would see the kind of food I ate, suggesting that I should eat estrogen-blocking foods to reduce estrogen levels (only then could I get back to normal)." (*FGD, gay students, South).

Teachers sometimes tried all means to change LGBT students, not realizing the harm this caused. A gay male student said "the homeroom teacher knew that I had been beaten because I am a bit abnormal, she advised me to become a normal person" (FGD, gay male students, South); a lesbian student commented "students were all requested to put on long dress. I did not put it on; then the school blamed me and called my parents…asking why my mom let me look like a boy" (IDI, a lesbian student, South). There were also cases where teachers reportedly treated LGBT students so poorly, lacking the understanding or skills on how to treat them with support, that LGBT students needed to leave the school:

"At the beginning of our Grade 10, there was a girl,

she was a temporary class monitor. By that time we realized that she was very fond of other girls. None of our classmates said anything but a teacher did. She hated her and asked her to do more difficult tests. Her parents have taken actions but the more they did the more the teacher hated her. That teacher even requested the class head teacher to withdraw her class monitorship (...) Later, that student had to move to another school." (IDI, an upper secondary male student, Central).

Occasionally parents discussed their disappointment in teachers who swore at, shamed or hit students; for example one parent said, "Teachers without tenderness indirectly enable violence...teachers should set good examples for students" (FGD, parents, upper secondary school, North). However parents did not specifically reproach teachers for their SOGIE-related school violence. This appeared to leave LGBT students mostly alone in an intrinsically unequal battle with (the inherently more powerful adult) school staff. Without the support of parents, it seems that many LGBT students will continue facing violence at school until the schools themselves actively intervene.

LGBT students suffered the most violence

In order to understand the rate of student groups who had suffered violence in the last six months (at the time of the survey), the survey results obtained from LGBT and non-LGBT students were compared. The comparison showed that the highest frequency of violence in the last six months was experienced by LGBT students, and this applied to both males and females (Table 2 below). This difference is highly significant in statistical terms (p=0.000). Gay, bisexual and gender non-conforming male and male-to-female transgender (GBT) students suffered the greatest amount of all forms of violence in the last six months.

Physical violence had been experienced by 56.5% (over half) of GBT students and 36.3% (over a third) of LBT students in the last six months (compared to 41% of males and 27.7% of females from the non-LGBT group). The LGBT students mentioned many types of physical violence such as being hit with hands, feet and/ or legs, having objects or weapons thrown at or used on their body, being confined in a certain room, and other experiences such being touched in their private parts for so-called "sex checks". Parents confirmed that their children have been hit or kicked.

Verbal violence was reported by 48.6% (almost half) of male GBT students versus 33.3% (a third) of LBT students in the last six months (compared to under a third of students generally). LGBT students who participated in FGDs and IDIs said that verbal violence often happened under the forms of name-calling and ridiculing, and use of foul terms and language. A range of cruel words were used according to the students; most commonly LGBT students mentioned being called a "pervert" and other terms less recognizable to adults as homophobic or transphobic slurs when used due to differences in slang between older and younger generations. For males these derogatory slang terms included *'pê-đê', 'bóng kín',* and "*bóng lộ*". For females, slang terms included: *'ô môi'* or simply *'les'* for lesbian. Comments about gender were also used both for any LGBT students (regardless of whether or not they were transgender) showing students' misunderstandings about the relationship between one's sex, gender and sexuality. One gay male student recalled, "schoolmates call me *'pê đê'* (derogatory term for being gay), because according to them, I walk like a girl" (IDI, a lower secondary gay male student, South). A gender non-conforming student said "when I went home from school, a group of young people riding their motorbikes approached and beat me, scolding me and calling me a gay, a pervert" (FGD, gender non-conforming students, North). Teachers and parents sometimes expressed their belief that such

Table 2: Types of violence experienced by LGBT and non-LGBT students in the last six months

Have suffered violence in the last 6 months									
	None-LGBT				LGBT				p-value
	Male		Female		Male		Female		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Physical violence	365	41.0%	266	27.7%	147	56.5%	176	36.3%	.000***
Verbal violence	282	31.7%	236	24.6%	126	48.6%	161	33.3%	.000***
Psychosocial violence	293	33.0%	288	30.1%	132	50.8%	187	38.9%	.000***
Sexual violence	114	12.8%	50	5.2%	90	34.6%	49	10.2%	.000***
Technology-related violence	65	7.3%	37	3.8%	53	20.4%	39	8.1%	.000***

*Note: * p < 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001*

incidents were quite prevalent in schools – one principal said "verbal violence does occur frequently in schools" (IDI, an administrator, South), for example. In spite of that, some teachers and parents considered this just a sort of "foul language" between students and not a form of violence. For example, one teacher said "Once I came across some students…hearing "bad words" on each other (so I) reminded them about the student code" (IDI, a lower secondary administrator, Central). A parent commented, "Female students just have a habit of bad-mouthing about or slander each other" (FGD, upper secondary parents, South). Considering this was the form of violence LGBT students feared most, adults often took too casual an approach to it, seeing this common youthful behaviors rather than deeper bias.

Psychosocial violence was endured by around half (50.8%) of male GBT students compared to 38.9% of LBT students in the last six months (compared to under a third of students generally). This violence exists in schools in various forms, such as psychosocial exclusion, isolation, being excluded from a group, being ignored. The students in FGDs and IDIs acknowledged that these forms of violence had happened in schools. Nevertheless, both parent and teacher groups did not explicitly mention this form of violence. An LGBT student explained that students who got excluded at their school particularly included "girlish boys" (IDI, LGBT students, Central).

Sometimes isolation occurred in communal spaces such as classrooms, bathrooms or changing rooms where the LGBT student would be falsely accused of potentially attacking others (showing sexual interest or stalking) despite their goal of simply going about their day. For example, some lesbians discussed being targeted for social exclusion in girls' bathrooms: one commented that when she went to the toilet girls would run in and out of the bathrooms telling everybody "oh, this girl is a lesbian, don't come in there or she would stare at our (bodies)" (IDI, a lesbian upper secondary student, South). In many such examples, LGBT people were subtly victimized by being first cast as villains on false grounds, and then excluded.

Sexual violence was suffered by over a third of GBT students (compared to around one-tenth of LBT students, 13% of male students and less than 7% of female students in the non-LGBT group). This was a highly significant difference that put GBT at particular risk compared to the other groups. Most of the cases of sexual violence were related to being spied on in the toilets or having one's pants pulled down and one's private parts publicly exposed. There were also several incidents of perpetrators taking exposing/sexual photos of others without permission, and uploading them to the Internet. Males were frequently perpetrators. Some males recounted incidents of sexual violence perpetrated by

other boys they knew which they felt unable to stop, for example: **"**When I was studying in Grade 7, some classmates (male peers) took off my shirt and pulled my pants down…and laughed at me" (IDI, an upper secondary male student, South).

Many of the LGBT students who had been sexually abused by peers did not know how to stop it and did not receive help from bystanders. It may be useful for all students to learn skills to respond to their peers' behaviors, both in self-defence and to defend others.

Technology-related violence was experienced by one-fifth of LGBT male students (compared to 8.1% of LGBT female students, 7.3% of Non-LGBT males and 3.8% of females). Participating students, teachers and parents all pointed out that this type of violence had happened in school, in such forms as bad mouthing online or through mobile phone texts, spreading bad rumors and expressing negative comments on Facebook pages. Students explained "some peers post on Facebook to ridicule the others …or use fake accounts on Facebook to raise and/or pass on bad rumors against others" (FGD, female students, upper secondary school, North).

Some conflicts originated on Facebook and then led to violence in the real world "a group of students in grade 7 had some kind of argument on Facebook. At first they confronted each other to talk about it and later, they met in a deserted place and ended up fighting" (IDI, a male student, lower secondary school, South). A transgender student explained how she had been excluded from a dance team she had led, after "someone stated on Facebook that it is unacceptable to have a transgender as team leader" (IDI, a male-to-female transgender student, Central). However, this type of violence was perhaps less prevalent than parents and teachers appeared to assume (according to the earlier data on their awareness of violence) and no participants talked about the positive possibilities of the internet in addressing violence or specifically helping SOGIE-related bias or LGBT students as it has been seen to elsewhere. Despite its flaws, technology is set to stay, so more positive practices around its use need to be explored and taught in schools.

4.3. LGBT students' perception of school safety

Data from the surveys (see Table 3 below) showed that LGBT students were less likely to assess their school as a safe space (only 72.7% did so), compared to non-LGBT male (75.8%) and female (78.1%) students. The relationship was statistically significant. This appeared to reflect the data on violence, which showed LGBT students to be most at risk of violence of all kinds, and GBT to be more at risk than any other group considered. The survey results showed that LGBT students have also worried about being abused by other students more than non-LGBT male and female students. LGBT students

additionally worried the most (16.5% were worried) about being abused by school staff. Proportions of non-LGBT male and female students who have worried about this were equally lower (at 11.4%). One LGBT student discussed their feelings of danger at school also impacted their experience of homework.

Places more likely to occur violence against LGBT Students

Within schools, there are places that students consider the most unsafe, especially toilet areas or places located far from the offices of the school managers and teachers, or places with no monitoring equipment. The most unsafe places in schools according to many LGBT students were the school toilets and changing rooms. Many same-sex attracted boys and girls described how peers treated them as if they were sexually aggressive when they were simply trying to use the toilets, and so toilets became a location either of social exclusion or judgment. For example, one gay male student reported "when I used the toilet, my friends did not dare to come in (as if I were going to attack them). I thought they were afraid of me" (FGD, gay male upper secondary students, Central). A lesbian similarly commented, "when I went to the toilet, girls stared at me as if I were a monster" (FGD, lesbian upper secondary students, Central).

Toilets and changing rooms were also a high risk area for transgender students or those who were non-conforming in their gender expression, as these were sites where they had to navigate expectations for how they looked or what their sex category was. Many individuals described being chased out of toilets or changing rooms because their gender expression was non-conforming, for example, a female student who was often called a 'tomboy' by her friends reported:

*"There was one time I entered the female toilet, some peers saw me and said: 'hey, this is the female toilet; the male toilet is on the other side'. Very often, I looked back and forth (to check nobody was around) and then just jumped into the male toilet." (*FGD, lower female gender non-conforming secondary students).

Focus groups and interviews with groups of teachers/administrators, parents and non-LGBT students also identified that violence happened in areas beyond the

school grounds including, for example, in the school hall, areas behind schools, in canteen lines, at the area surrounding the front school gate, behind the school, in local public areas or on the trip from or to home. Non-LGBT students generally offered reasons for why toilet blocks were considered dangerous including that they were rarely monitored by staff; "toilet areas are the most unsafe areas as students often fight there (…) and teachers do not go there so often" (FGD, upper secondary students, South). However, many LGBT students in the FGDs and IDIs suggested that the issue with violence in gendered spaces such as toilets and changing rooms went beyond the problem that they were simply located away from staff or were less frequently monitored. LGBT students particularly argued that these spaces were key sites for danger to LGBT people because they were locations segregated by sex and thus where people felt 'vulnerable' to those who presented their gender differently. To ensure equity, LGBT students often said there should be gender-neutral toilets (as successfully used by many students in a city school), so that they and other students could avoid the very difficult to discuss problem of being gender-policed, humiliated by cruel taunts, or prevented from using gendered toilets when they needed to relieve themselves (as how somebody looks, or who they are attracted to, would no longer be a reason for exclusion from such toilets).

4.3. Reaction to violence and attempts to seek helps of LGBT students

Reactions to violence

The surveys and interviews with all stakeholder groups included questions on the reactions of victims and witnesses of SOGIE-related school violence. Of the options provided, the student victims of violence surveyed were most likely to report that they responded by seeking assistance from adults – 29.3% of LGBT students had this response. Figure below shows that of seven options, 'Doing nothing/keeping silent' was the second most popular option – and particularly more popular with LGBT students (18.7% of the LGBT student victims chose this option, compared to 13.8% of the in the non-LGBT group). Some non-LGBT male

Table 3: Students' assessments of their safety at school

	Male		Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Level of school safety adequate	663	75.6%	742	78.1%	536	72.7%	0.038*
Worried about being abused by schoolmates	234	26.7%	303	31.9%	244	33.1%	0.011*
Worried about being abused by teachers	99	11.4%	108	11.4%	121	16.5%	0.000

*Note: * p < 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001*

and LBT female students particularly chose to 'fight back fiercely'. Less popular options included seeking out a group's assistance to get revenge, calling a hotline for help, being scared/begging and lastly, attempting to compromise with perpetrators by buying protection through money or gifts. The data collected from IDIs and FGDs with students affirmed these findings and suggested silence was often seen as a viable option because students felt that if they reported violence, their attacker may take revenge.
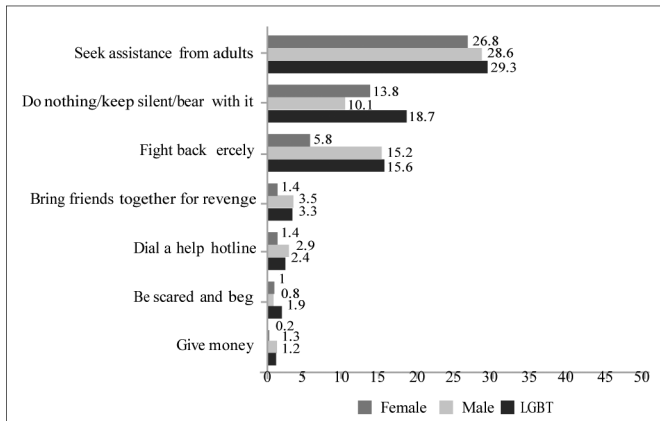

Figure 1. Reported responses of victim students

Attempts to seek helps of LGBT students

To understand who student victims of violence sought help from in the survey, we provided a question offering a list of key people in their lives whom they might turn to. Of the options provided, Figure 2 below shows that the LGBT student victims of violence surveyed online were most likely to report that they sought assistance from friends – nearly one-fifth (19.1%) sought their friends' aid (compared to around one-tenth of non-LGBT students). They were less likely than the non-LGBT group to report to school staff (12.5% including teachers/administrators – 5.4%, and principals – 7.1%; compared to 17.7% for non-LGBT students including teachers/administrators – 14.8%, and principals – 2.9%) or parents and members of their family (12.4% compared to 16.9% for non-LGBT students).
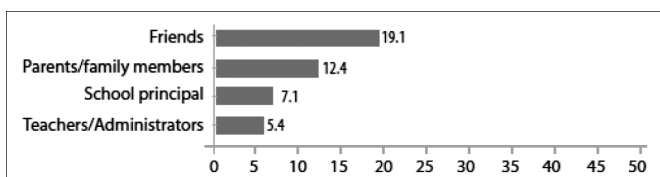

Figure 2: Key people that LGBT student victims reported seeking assistance from

(LGBT online survey, N=241)

This showed there was a sense that LGBT students had less support from adults at home and at school than the non-LGBT students. The interviews and discussions moreover suggested that LGBT students, who appeared to experience increased violence, felt less convinced that adults would offer them assistance, safety or support. One LGBT student commented "I rarely share my concerns with teachers" (FGD, LGBT students, North) for example, while another explained that instead of reporting to parents or teachers, LGBT respondents express more trust in peers – "I have never tried to meet my teacher to share personal matters with her. I just share them with peers" (IDI, a lesbian student, Central). A bisexual female student argued that teachers would not likely respond in a supportive manner to LGBT students' requests for help, and that she personally had not yet met a teacher whom she believed would care about her experiences of violence:

"There was one time I thought that if I confided in my teacher, she would be able to understand me! But then I thought about it again and realized that my teacher would not act according to my expectations. So I decided not to reach out. In fact, I am a reserved and shy person, perhaps because there has been no teacher who is caring enough for me to share my concerns and thoughts with." (IDI, a bisexual female student, North)

This showed that without strong educational messaging, policies and campaigns on the creation of safe schools for LGBT students, many students had little faith that SOGIE-related school violence could be prevented and solved.

5. Discussion
5.1. Lack of awareness of SOGIE-related violence

The study showed a lack of awareness and understanding of SOGIE-related school violence – particularly the damaging nature of verbal violence – among all education stakeholder groups (students, teachers/staff and parents) participating in the research. LGBT students were most aware of these problems, followed by Non-LGBT students who witnessed or participated in the violence. Parents, teachers and administrators appeared less aware of SOGIE-related school violence without prompting. It was clear that education and strong messaging on these issues needed to be provided through schools to redress gaps in awareness and understanding.

5.2. SOGIE Stereotypes

Sexuality and gender stereotypes and norms impact LGBT students and can influence SOGIE-related school violence. Many parents had little understanding of gender diversity, and therefore this group often suggested that parents and staff should interfere immediately when children show signs of diverse or non-conforming gender expression. LGBT children can refrain from coming out for this reason, or may

legitimately fear family rejection. The lack of awareness of LGBT issues amongst teachers and administrators can lead to their assigning themselves the responsibility of "correcting" and intervening in LGBT identities or diverse gender expressions (which, according to those teachers, equated to non-compliance with and deviance from gender norms or psychological disease). In doing so, teachers had at times unintentionally engaged in or indirectly encouraged SOGIE-related school violence. Unfortunately, such teachers genuinely still believed that they were helping those who were "gender deviant" and creating conditions to enable them to "get on better" with peers. The differences between current approaches, and those which would create a "safe and supportive" environment for LGBT students, need to be more clearly spelled out in education policy guidelines.

5.3. High risk of violence for LGBT students

The research unveiled that LGBT students (and those perceived to be LGBT) were at remarkably higher risk of violence than non-LGBT students. During the six months preceding the surveys conducted under this research, LGBT students experienced the highest proportion of violent behaviors (in the full range of forms of violence. They also had the lowest perception of safety at school. As previously pointed out, due to impacts of gender stereotypes about masculinity and femininity norms, and especially the higher valuing of masculinity above femininity in a society heavily influenced by Confucianism, more feminine male GBT students were vulnerable to violence than masculine female LBT students. In addition, sometimes "tomboy" female LBT students were even quite popular with both LGBT and non-LGBT peers. These findings, with the emphasis on the greater potential social value of masculinity for a range of people, differ from relevant studies of Thailand, for example, where feminine roles are available to a greater range of people (Mahidol University et al, 2014).

5.4. Inaction on SOGIE rights and violence

Acceptance and inaction towards SOGIE-related school violence was highly problematic in Viet Nam's schools. A culture of inaction was contributed to by parents, school administrators and teachers, students and even LGBT students who had experienced violence. The proportion of LGBT students who would "do nothing" about violence they experienced was higher than that of the non-LGBT students. Fear was a powerful determinant for inaction, both for potential allies scared of revenge if they helped and victims afraid to speak out. Fear of being labeled LGBT even led some students to join in violent acts. These findings highlighted the concerning lack of empowerment and skills amongst all stakeholders

to recognize and respond to SOGIE-related school violence, and also suggested the likelihood that many had lost hope that they could speak out in safety or get the support they deserve. A holistic approach to intervention is needed to prevent and respond to SOGIE-related school violence for schools, families and the broader social environment, combining educational guidelines with practical changes, resource development and inter-sectoral studies. This approach needs to consider the new harms and opportunities presented by new technologies; the internet and mobile phones can be not only sites of violence, but of education and support for LGBT youth. It is also essential to consider and properly frame the extent of schools' responsibilities for SOGIE-related school violence both on and off its physical campus site, including technological environments, for all stakeholders.

Specific interventions emphasized by LGBT students are to prioritize education on SOGIE themes for all stakeholders; privacy (whether in violence responses or counseling provisions); and allowance for gender non-conformity (including uniform lenience and provisions of unisex toilets).

6. Recommendations for the prevention and coping with SOGIE-related school violence

6.1. For curriculum developers and policy-makers

Curriculum developers and policy-makers should review current subjects, curriculum and education policies through the lens of SOGIE-related school violence in order to remove prejudiced content and statements or content that are no longer suitable. They are advised to add contemporary best practice in protection for high-risk groups (including LGBT students) in anti-violence codes and guidelines on prevention and responses, as well as explanations for terms and concepts related to gender diversity, gender expressions and sexual orientations – following the path of the latest Asia-Pacific research, and resources and examples in UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO, 2011).

It is necessary to supplement materials on gender and sex, gender equality, sexual and gender diversity to secondary schools' textbook boxes and libraries in order to allow teachers and students to access them easily.

Incorporating aspects related to gender equality and gender and sexual diversity into teacher training curricula, can contribute to equip future teachers with sufficient understanding and relevant skills related to these issues. Training updates should also be delivered to staff of all levels in order to help them develop more open attitudes towards LGBT students.

Establishing a well-structure inter-sectoral collaboration between educational, health care, information and communication management

authorities through high-level meetings and theme-based forums could build and enhance common understanding and awareness about gender and sexual diversity more broadly. Civil society engagement with organizations such as UNESCO can support Government bodies to further develop relationships with non-government organizations, including LGBT and rights organizations, to help to introduce these issues sensitively, particularly in the initial phase.

6.2. For schools

Education system leadership and schools need to conduct professional training programs, workshops, seminars and the like for teachers and school management staff of the entire sector on SOGIE issues including school violence prevention and response specifically for violence against LGBT students, so that schools can become safer and more supportive spaces for all. This will involve encouraging a new form of 'professionalism' in staff codes and policies which values equity and non-discriminatory attitudes, and foregrounds due respect and treatment in dealing with every student regardless of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

School staff are encouraged to organize rich and interesting activities that are suitable with the students' age group on topics related to gender and sexual diversity so as to provide opportunities for students to develop their understanding and attitudes toward LGBT peers. Ideally, students would be presented with information on related human rights principles and resources.

School system leadership and staff are encouraged to create a culture of non-violence and provide more favorable conditions and environments for LGBT individuals to exercise their rights and to fully exhibit their personal identities and capabilities like any other student. The #PurpleMySchool campaign was one example of a fun age-appropriate awareness-raising educational opportunity in 2015 which many Asian schools, including those in Viet Nam, engaged in, wearing purple and participating in activities to support safe spaces for LGBT learners.

Schools should also adopt more flexible regulations regarding school uniforms and aim towards the provision of at least some unisex toilet options on campus.

Schools need to take the initiative in setting up LGBT-friendly and privacy-focused school social affairs units, school psychological services or student counseling services operated by professionally trained staff and/or teachers.

7. Conclusion

This study indicated a number of issues concerning the safe of and protection for LGBT students in schools, including the lack of awareness about SOGIE-related school violence, the high risks of violence that LGBT students face, their perception of school safety and their responses to violence. It uncovered the conservative beliefs about gender and sexual orientation held by many school stakeholders, parents, and the need for holistic action which combats prejudices and violence while protecting the privacy and diverse expressions of LGBT students. Innovation and reform to Vietnamese education policies, curricula and practices would greatly enable such change, and the study's findings provided various recommendations towards ensuring that schools in Viet Nam become safer, more healthy and supportive spaces for all students, particularly LGBT and those perceived to be LGBT.

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